



CITY OF SANTA BARBARA

COUNCIL AGENDA REPORT

AGENDA DATE: March 11, 2008

TO: Mayor and Councilmembers

FROM: Environmental Services Division, Finance Department

SUBJECT: Update On Proposed Ban Of Expanded Polystyrene

RECOMMENDATION:

That Council receive a report from staff detailing the results of a recent study evaluating the merits of banning expanded polystyrene, commonly referred to as "Styrofoam," in the food service sector in the City of Santa Barbara.

DISCUSSION:

Expanded polystyrene (EPS), commonly known as "Styrofoam," is used by restaurants, grocery stores and other food-serving establishments because it is inexpensive, strong and durable, and has excellent insulation properties. However, due to its fly-away tendencies, EPS often winds up on City streets and beaches as litter. In addition, a large amount of this material makes its way to the ocean and is ingested by sea life, which is having significant impacts to the marine environment worldwide. For these reasons, EPS has been banned in a number of communities, and is being considered by many others.

In April 2007, staff provided Council with an update on its Solid Waste Strategic Plan. The plan included a proposed ban of EPS applicable only to take-out food service businesses in the City. Staff indicated that more analysis was needed to evaluate the logistics, practicality and feasibility of imposing a ban in the City of Santa Barbara. The City Council directed staff to move forward with the analysis, present the results of staff's analysis to the Council's Solid Waste Committee for review and consideration, and provide a final report to the City Council.

REVIEWED BY: _____ Finance _____ Attorney _____ Name of Additional Department(s) That Need to Review CAR

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In November 2007, staff presented a report to the Solid Waste Committee based on our analysis. The report discussed staff's evaluation of alternative food service ware that could be used to replace EPS, including food service ware made from paper, plastic, aluminum and compostable products.

In addition, staff presented the results of several outreach meetings conducted with community stakeholders, which included owners and managers of local restaurants, individuals representing the food packaging industry, and local environmental organizations.

Based on the analysis, staff concluded that alternatives to EPS likely to be used had comparable environmental impacts. For example, the use of service ware made from plastic, aluminum or virgin paper has different, but equally significant, impacts when considering the resources required for extracting and manufacturing them. In addition, due to contamination, many of these materials would not be recyclable and therefore would have to be disposed of in the local landfill.

However, food service ware made from compostable materials has a much less overall impact to the environment. Specifically, it is often made from organic material, such as potato or corn starch; requires significantly less resources to produce than plastic or virgin paper; is not petroleum-based; and can be easily be recycled into compost. The use of food service ware made from compostable materials has other benefits:

1. It would significantly reduce the volume of material being landfilled (i.e., more diversion);
2. It reduces the organic fraction of the waste stream disposed of in a landfill, which is the leading man-made source of methane gas production, a potent greenhouse gas contributing to climate change; and
3. Compost is a product used by farmers to enrich and provide nutrients to the soil, helping to conserve water, and preventing soil erosion.

Based on the above findings, staff concluded that a ban on EPS would only be effective and have a net benefit to the environment if it either required, or otherwise strongly encouraged, the use of food service ware made from compostable material. However, these benefits could only be realized with a citywide organics collection and composting program already in place. Without this program in place, the use of compostable food service ware would only result in those materials winding up in the landfill; and in the same way food does, compostable material would also breakdown quickly and result in the production of methane gas.

Staff's proposal, therefore, is to first implement an organics collection and composting program sector by sector, starting with the business sector, where the largest volume of foodscraps are generated, followed by the single-family and multi-family residential sectors. Once the program was implemented citywide, the City could then implement a ban on EPS, requiring or strongly encouraging the use of food service ware made from compostable material. This would establish a collection system, including containers designated for organic materials, to support the use of compostable products. Staff estimates that an ordinance banning EPS in the City would be implemented in late 2010.

On January 29, 2008, staff presented a newly updated action plan to the Solid Waste Committee, including proposed staff changes, to advance the various projects and initiatives. The action plan incorporated the recommended approach and timing for implementing a ban on EPS as discussed in this report. The Solid Waste Committee was supportive of the recommended approach, and expressed an overall desire to implement all elements of the action plan in an expeditious manner.

Note that staff's proposed work plan and staff changes will be presented to the City Council on the same day as a companion agenda item.

PREPARED BY: Robert Samario, Assistant Finance Director

SUBMITTED BY: Robert D. Peirson, Finance Director

APPROVED BY: City Administrator's Office